

# From the Land

WINTER/1980



"White Oaks," 1979 Photograph courtesy of Tom Zetterstrom

The Nature Conservancy  
Connecticut Chapter  
Science Tower  
PO Box MMM  
Wesleyan Station  
Middletown, Connecticut 06457  
Tel. 203-344-0716

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102322P 1K 00 006 8012  
DR & MRS RICHARD H GOODWIN  
BOX 1445  
CONNECTICUT COLLEGE  
NEW LONDON CT 06320



National Office: 1800 North Kent St., Arlington, Virginia 22209

The Nature Conservancy Connecticut Chapter



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## THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

Over the past twelve months the Connecticut Chapter has been attempting to increase its membership in Connecticut and expand the support needed to protect more critical natural habitats. We have conducted an extensive direct mail campaign to over 12,750 people in the state, soliciting their participation in the urgent task of setting aside the best remaining examples of our natural heritage, including the habitat of plants and animals threatened with extinction. As 1979 came to a close, the Chapter added 349 new members to its growing list of dedicated conservationists.

To all of you who responded to this appeal, the Connecticut Chapter extends its deepest thanks.

## ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO

"White Oaks," taken by Tom Zetterstrom in 1979, is one of the photographs from his portfolio, "Portraits of Trees," to be published by *Aperture Magazine* this spring.

Tom Zetterstrom was born in 1945. He received his B.A. in sculpture and photography from Colorado College in 1967. He attended Pratt Institute from 1967-1968. From 1968-1970 he was Director of Photography at the Art and Architecture Center in Washington, D.C. Since then he has earned his living as a free-lance and fine arts photographer.

A one-man show of Mr. Zetterstrom's two remarkable series of photographs, "Portraits of Trees" and the "Moving-Point-of-View," is currently being exhibited at the Mead Art Gallery of Amherst College, Amherst, Mass., until March 12th.

Below: "Black Birches," in the Smith, Hinchman and Grylls Collection in Detroit, Michigan.



## ANNUAL MEETING DATE SET

This year's Connecticut Chapter Annual Members Meeting will be held in Salisbury on May 31. Set this date aside now and plan to attend. Look for details of the meeting and field trips in our spring edition of *From the Land*. Visits to two new preserves in Salisbury should make this year's meeting especially worthwhile.



# SPECIAL REPORT: BLUFF HEAD PRESERVE



"Old Smiley" 180 million year old Fossil Fish Photography courtesy of Jeff O'Bara

## CHAPTER PRESERVES SIGNIFICANT FOSSIL FISH SITE

The Connecticut Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has been able to preserve what is purported to be Connecticut's most significant paleontological locale. Called the Bluff Head Preserve with 75 wooded acres, it contains a fossil fish site with specimens dating from the Triassic-Jurassic age of some 180-190 million years ago.

The fossils are found in layers of shale laid down in extensive lake beds of that distant time.

According to Jelle de Boer, chairman of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Wesleyan University, "Fossil and mineral localities in our state are being rapidly destroyed. They are not renewable and don't grow back the next season. Since mining has basically ceased, it is also highly unlikely that new sites will be discovered. Protection of known sites is therefore of utmost importance ... The public is well aware of the dinosaurs which frolicked along the shores of lakes, but knows little about the fish and other abundant life which was necessary to sustain dinosaur herds."

Scientists are just beginning to unlock the secrets of the region's ancient environments through the study of these well preserved fossil fishes, fossil spores, pollen grains and cone scales. Bluff Head has been the focus of intensive geological research by paleontologists from

Yale and Wesleyan and the American Museum of Natural History.

## FUNDS NEEDED NOW FOR FISH SITE LOAN HELP MEET MATCHING GRANT!

The purchase price of the Bluff Head Preserve was \$57,500. The funds were immediately provided with a loan from the national office of The Nature Conservancy to protect the property in last-minute bidding against a developer with plans to subdivide the land. Now the Connecticut Chapter must raise the funds to pay back the loan.

The good news is that an extremely generous, anonymous donor has pledged an incentive grant of \$25,000 which must be matched by other contributions to remain in force, and with interest accruing on the loan the sooner we can pay it back the better.

The challenging news is that we must not only meet the requirements of the matching grant, but also raise the additional funds to meet the purchase price and provide an endowment for the ongoing stewardship of the endangered area.

An envelope has been boldly inserted into this issue of FROM THE LAND. We hope you will make a contribution toward the preservation of the Fossil Fish Site.



## FOSSIL LOCALE: IT'S A PUZZLEMENT

A letter from Dr. Bobb Schaeffer of the American Museum of Natural History emphasized the enigma which faces Conservancy members concerning the fossil fish site. How to solicit support for a preserve which is basically off-limits to the general public?

"The primary purpose in saving a productive fossil locality is to make it available for future generations of paleontologists who want additional specimens and related geological data. Toward this end, it is important that the locality be preserved without publicity, and with exact information about its whereabouts somehow restricted to those who will not exploit it for personal reasons. The Fossil Butte National Monument in SW Wyoming is protected by the National Park Service with a Ranger in residence ... Quarries on privately owned land are producing hundreds of specimens for the tourist trade, but fortunately some are getting into museum collections. The big problem is to keep the amateur collectors and rock hounds away from these sites. Whatever they find is usually lost to science unless such individuals are exceptionally well informed and dedicated. They do exist, but are relatively rare ...

"It is indeed unfortunate that a famous locality in North Bergen, New Jersey could not be saved in the late fifties. It yielded a variety of Triassic fossils and was visited by hundreds of geology students every year."

## "TOOTH OF A SMALL DINOSAUR ALSO DISCOVERED"

Sid Quarrier, Supervising Geologist of the State of Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection, wrote to provide more information about the fossil fish site of Bluff Head:

"The site is one of the most important geologic localities in the state. This importance is related primarily to the scientific value of fossil material excavated from the site and to the real potential for further excavation. A large number of high quality fossil fish specimens have been recovered and studied. A tooth of a small dinosaur was also discovered. Polynological data from the site represented a significant part of the data used to reclassify the age of these strata ...

"In my present position, I am responsible for geologic mapping in the state and for evaluation of geologic sites for inclusion in the Connecticut Natural Areas Inventory. I have concluded ... that the Bluff Head site should have been the highest priority for acquisition ..."

Addendum for peripatetic members of the Chapter:

Morocco was located against the Atlantic Coast of North America in Triassic time. Scientists are hopeful that fossil fish similar to those of Bluff Head will be found in the Triassic rocks of North America.



The brook at Bluff Head



## 1979—AN ACTIVE YEAR FOR CHAPTER ACQUISITIONS

In 1979, the Connecticut Chapter continued its outstanding land protection record, acquiring or otherwise protecting over 1,300 acres of natural lands across the State. Over 680 acres were protected in the last three months alone. More important, however, we secured three areas listed on the Chapter's "Top 20" acquisition list, assuring protection of areas of statewide ecological significance.

### *Hamlet Hill Farm*

Three hundred and twenty acres of forestland in Salisbury, a gift of John A. B. Mitchell, Henry B. Mitchell, Mary M. McClintock, and Agnes M. Forsyth. The area lies to the east of the village of Salisbury and covers the top of Wetuwanchu Mountain, stretching from the scenic Salmon Creek Valley on the west to Prospect Mountain on the east. Over a mile of the Appalachian Trail crosses the land, affording hikers a magnificent view of the Berkshires to the north. The property also contains some old groves of hemlock and pine, and a wealth of spring wildflowers along the margins of a small swamp. The property will be managed by a local stewardship committee aided by the Salisbury Association.

### *Mount Higby Natural Area*

One hundred twenty-two acres of steep cliffs and talus slopes comprise one of the best examples of trap-rock ridges, listed as "critical habitat" in Dowhan and Craig's *Rare and Endangered Species of Connecticut and Their Habitats*, 1975. A section of Connecticut's Blue Trail runs along the top of Mount Higby with unobstructed views of Long Island Sound to the south, Mount Tom in Massachusetts to the north, and the Litchfield Hills to the west. Many species of plants uncommon to Connecticut grow along the base of these talus slopes, and the slopes themselves afford botanists a unique opportunity to study lichen growth. The preserve is the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Houston. Mr. Houston was twice former mayor of Meriden and with the State Department in India.

### *Bellamy Preserve*

Situated in the very center of the Town of Bethlehem, this 90-acre property has been leased from Miss Caroline Ferriday to establish a wildlife sanctuary. The property is an interesting mixture of open fields, forest plantations, and wood swamp, providing a variety of habitat for the locally abundant wildlife. The preserve will be managed jointly by the Connecticut Chapter and the newly formed Bethlehem Land Trust as an educational area for local schools. A well laid-out network of trails exist and will be maintained by a group of volunteers. The preserve lies adjacent to the historic Bellamy homestead, where Dr. Joseph Bellamy ran the first theological seminary in Connecticut.

### *Turtle Creek Wildlife Sanctuary*

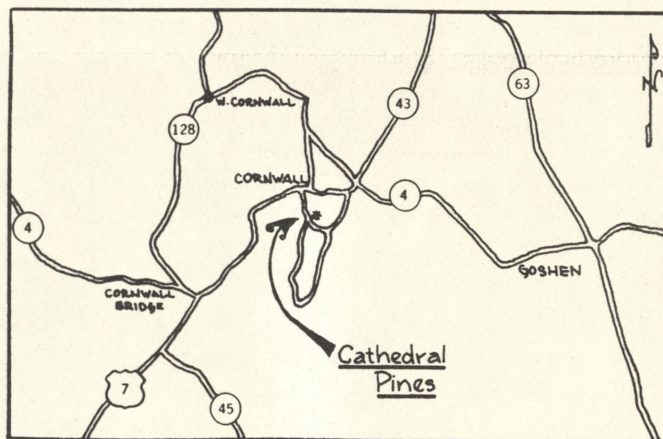
Governor and Mrs. Chester Bowles conveyed an addi-

tional  $\frac{1}{13}$  interest in 89 acres in Essex and Old Saybrook. Turtle Creek lies adjacent to the Connecticut River and contains tidal marshlands, upland mixed hardwood forest, and an area of deep hemlock woods. Ospreys are frequent visitors to the preserve, and Bald Eagles have been sighted resting in the trees along the river.

### *Greenwich Cove Marshes*

Located in Old Greenwich, this 0.25-acre parcel of saltmarsh is an additional gift of Mrs. Torsten Forsberg. This donation brings the Conservancy ownership of this small but vital remnant of coastal marsh to slightly over 2 acres. The preserve contains a typical assemblage of marsh plants and provides a welcomed resting and feeding area for wading birds.

The Chapter's other acquisitions during 1979 were listed in our summer issue of *From the Land*. In addition to our own protection projects, the Conservancy lent financial assistance to two local land trusts to further their own acquisition programs. These loans were made to the Roxbury Land Trust for purchase of the 360-acre Mine Hill property on the Shepaug River, and to the Pond Mountain Trust of Kent to acquire a key 30-acre inholding in their preserve adjacent to the Housatonic River.



Cathedral Pines Preserve—Cornwall

## SEE CATHEDRAL PINES IN MARCH

On Sunday, March 23rd, the Connecticut Chapter will sponsor a walk through Cathedral Pines beginning at 1:00 p.m. We will take a look at the study plots established in 1956, inspect the tornado damage, and walk part of the Appalachian Trail. The walk should last a couple of hours.

Directions: From Litchfield take Rte. 63 north to Goshen. Take Rte. 4 west to West Goshen and continue to Bunker Hill (by Mohawk State Forest). Go left at the blinking light—still on Rte. 4—and continue for one mile. Go left into Cornwall. Go straight through town and bear left at T on Valley Road. The road bears right; pull off and park.



## DENNIS FARM WALK

Jim Pepe, the Chairman of Dennis Farm Preserve in Abington, led a group of fifteen Conservancy friends over his backyard of 380 acres. After a three-mile trek in seasonable December weather, we returned to his and Maggie Pepe's 1747 farm house adjacent to the preserve for hot chocolate with whipped cream and cake. (Are you sorry that you missed it?)

The walk passed through a variety of habitat. The higher elevations support oak, ash and other hardwoods. Further downslope are dense laurel thickets and, as the soils become moister at lower elevations, red maple and black birch fill the canopy. Just outside the Conservancy's boundaries lie the 4-H camp ponds which have been dammed up by beavers. The woods are laced with stone walls, and the Old King's Highway runs directly through the preserve.

Dennis Farm was donated to the Conservancy in 1973 by Colonel Edward B. Dennis, whose family had bought the farm in the early 1800's. Sheep and dairy farming, and some logging, occurred on the land before it was abandoned for the rich farmland of Ohio. The land that remains in pasture is now rented to a neighboring farmer for his dairy stock. In the photo, Jim shows the group an automatic watering machine. As a cow reaches down for water in the dark basin, she presses against the white lever, allowing more water to flow into the trough.

Check the article in this newsletter on Cathedral Pines to learn about our next walk in March.



Jim Pepe  
explaining automatic  
watering machine

## LAND ACQUISITION WORKSHOPS

Three workshops for Preserve Stewardship Committees and Land trusts will be held in March: 15th—New Canaan, 22nd—Glastonbury, and 29th—Litchfield. The workshops are designed to make people aware of the options available in preserving land including the tax incentives, how to determine what areas should be included in a preserve for its ecological integrity, and how and why providing public benefit is increasingly important in maintaining the tax-exempt status of preserves.

The programs will run from 1:00 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. Anyone interested in attending should register with the Chapter office two weeks in advance of the workshop he/she wishes to attend. A \$2.00 fee to defray expenses is requested.

Map:

